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ABSTRACT

The mission of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) is to strengthen teaching in order to improve schools. There has been general agreement that a national certification system that could reliably identify teachers who meet high and rigorous standards would command the respect of the profession and public. The NBPTS has developed a certification process which is voluntary, signifies highly accomplished teaching based on a specific set of professional criteria, is uniform across the country, and was developed by educators for educators. National Board Certification involves meeting field-specific standards, completing a performance-based assessment process, and participating in continuing education and ongoing professional development. National Board Certification gives principals a fair means of identifying and recognizing accomplished teachers. Principals can look to Board-certified teachers to provide collegiate opportunities for growth and change. Another activity would use certified teachers as resources for new candidates. Evidence of increasing support for NBPTS accomplishments is described, and ways in which principals can support NBPTS efforts are noted. (JDD)

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# National Standards for Teachers

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*Barbara C. Shapiro*

*My primary goal as principal is to provide every student in my school with an excellent education. Reaching that goal requires a professional teaching force committed to students and their learning.*

Nettie Webb, Principal
Juniper Hills School
White Plains, New York

In the midst of the current debate on how best to raise the level of school performance, one fact remains clear: the single most important action we can take to improve schools is to strengthen teaching. That is the mission of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS).

In a recent first for American education, 81 middle-grade teachers from 23 states received national certification by the NBPTS. They were among the 289 candidates who completed a rigorous year-long field test that included interviews, essays, portfolios of student work, and videotapes of classroom instruction.

## Recognizing Outstanding Teachers

As educators are only too well aware, the teaching profession, unlike medicine, architecture, or accounting, has never codified the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that account for accomplished practice. As a result, there are many misconceptions about what constitutes good teaching.

Until now, most attempts to recognize accomplished teachers have been characterized by limited teacher involvement and the articulation of standards that are less than the highest. Consequently, teachers and principals have been somewhat skeptical about such efforts. There has been general agreement that a national certification system that could reliably identify teachers who meet high and rigorous standards would command the respect of the profession and the public. Such recognition would also make a critical difference in how communities view their teachers and, perhaps more important, in how teachers view themselves.

James A. Kelly, president of NBPTS, says, "Until now, there were no nationally accepted professional teaching standards to which teachers could aspire. Indeed, the authority structure of school organizations often makes little distinction between the first-year and the 20th-year teacher."

What NBPTS has done is to develop a certification process that differs from mandatory state licensing or certification in several critical ways. First, a state license to teach merely indicates that a licensee possesses minimum requirements, amounting to entry-level ability. In contrast, National Board Certification is voluntary and signifies highly accomplished teaching based on a specific set of professional criteria. Second, licensing standards vary from state to state, while National Board standards are uniform across the country. Finally, National Board Certification was developed by

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educators for educators, and not imposed by outsiders. It is awarded only to those who pass a series of performance-based assessments, involving both on-site and assessment center activities.

National Board Certification involves three critical elements:

**1. Standards**

The National Board's initial policies delineated five core propositions about excellent teaching:

- Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
- Teachers know their subjects and how to teach them to students.
- Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
- Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
- Teachers are members of learning communities.

The Board believes that a single certificate suggesting proficiency in teaching all subjects to all students of all ages is inadequate. Instead, National Board Certification plans to accommodate the diverse nature of teaching by establishing standards in more than 30 fields. The standards will cover both subject matter and developmental age of students. Some examples: Early Childhood (ages 3-8)/Generalist; Middle Childhood (ages 7-12)/Social Studies-History; and Early Adolescence (ages 11-15)/Mathematics.

Developing these standards to meet rigorous certification expectations is a complex process being undertaken by committee members, all of whom are experienced professional educators, including a number of principals. To date, 17 committees have been formed to develop standards in 21 fields.

**2. Assessment**

The NBPTS assessment system is designed to communicate a vision of teaching as a collegial enterprise involving complex decision making. The unique two-part system is performance-based and employs data collected both at a candidate's school and at an assessment center. The school-site assessment consists of portfolio documentation and on-site observation. The portfolio, developed by the candidate, includes curriculum guides, reflective essays, student projects and essays, and videos. The assessment center segment focuses on structured interviews, simulations, and knowledge of subject and pedagogy.

A Field Test Network (FTN), a consortium of teachers in school districts and major universities, provides access to a nationally representative sample of approximately 7 percent of the nation's elementary and secondary school teachers for the purpose of testing the assessments. The FTN also communicates information about the National Board to teachers, principals, and other educators.

During the 1994-95 school year, participants at 18 FTN sites are field-testing four new assessments: Early Childhood (ages 3-8)/Generalist; Middle Childhood (7-12)/Generalist; Early Adolescence (11-15)/Social Studies-History; and Adolescence and Young Adulthood (14-18)/Mathematics.

**3. Professional Development**

Excellence in teaching, as in other professions, requires continuing education and the ongoing refinement of practice. Unfortunately, for many experienced teachers, years of inservice training have been less rewarding than they should have been.

However, the materials and propositions on which the National Board Certification system is based are also valuable professional development tools for teachers, regardless of whether they plan to go through the actual certification process. For example, teachers have an opportunity to measure their own practice against rigorous professional standards and to reach for higher levels of accomplishment.

A number of groups have been formed by teachers who collaborate in videotaping classroom performance, reviewing specific lessons, and analyzing their teaching in relation to the NBPTS standards. The assessment portfolios also encourage collegiality and offer opportunities for critical self- and peer analysis.

Feedback from the first certification candidates provides evidence of the value of the assessment process in their professional development. Says one: "It turned out to be the most rewarding experience of my professional life. Not only was there much-needed self-reflection about my teaching, but I got to interact not just with other teachers, but with the *best* teachers in their area."

Another candidate describes how the process increased his awareness of the complexity of teaching, concluding, "This experience has given me a greater respect for teaching and heightened my professional confidence. It has improved my instruction and therefore my students' learning."

Professional development activities are an essential part of the certification system, and NBPTS has devised professional development models, in cooperation with FTN schools and districts, that provide collegial opportunities for growth and change. Another activity in the planning stage would use certified teachers as resources for

**PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY**

**This article is in support of the following standards from *Standards for Quality Elementary and Middle Schools, Revised Edition* (NAESP 1990):**

**Organization. Sufficient numbers of well-qualified personnel are provided to fulfill the school's goals.**

**Human Resource Development. The professional staff recognizes the need for continuing, voluntary professional development activities that promote personal growth.**

new candidates. NBPTS also plans to collaborate with other organizations to coordinate professional development within individual discipline areas, and to work with colleges of education to make teacher preparation more compatible with National Board standards.

**Federal, State and Local Support**

There is evidence of increasing support for NBPTS's accomplishments:

- Recent federal legislation refers to the importance of professional development, and specifically to NBPTS initiatives in this area. For example, the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) allows states and localities to fund financial or other incentives for teachers to receive National Board Certification.
- The Council of Chief State School Officers has developed the Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) to produce model standards, based on the NBPTS standards, for the initial licensing of teachers. More than half the states are also reexamining their licensing requirements in light of the new standards.
- A number of states (Arizona, Colorado, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Vermont) and districts have passed legislation providing specific incentives—license reciprocity, assumption of fees, bonuses, and salary increases—for teachers to become Board Certified.
- States and local school districts have granted continuing education credit for re-licensing teachers who complete the National Board Certification process.
- Contracts negotiated between teachers' unions and school districts in Boston and Rochester, New York, provide for reimbursement of National Board Certification fees. Both Boston and Rochester also consider certification as a special qualification for Lead Teacher, a position which carries greater autonomy and responsibilities—and in Boston, a 10 percent salary increase.

## Sharing the Vision

**There are several ways in which principals can support the National Board's efforts:**

- **Distribute NBPTS standards to teachers.**
- **Suggest that teachers form reading and discussion groups built around the standards.**
- **Encourage teachers to seek National Board Certification.**
- **Offer incentives such as time off or flexible schedules for teachers preparing for National Board Certification.**

- The NBPTS efforts have been endorsed by major education organizations, including the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals. In addition, the National Board has received more than $45 million in financial support from private foundations and corporations, as well as specific Congressional appropriations.

**Certification and the Principal**

The National Board is hopeful that the success of its certification system will lead principals to encourage teachers to acquire Board Certification, and to look for Board-certified teachers when hiring. All too often, principals have no meaningful way to acknowledge excellent teachers, whose work often goes unrecognized and unrewarded. National Board Certification gives principals a fair means of identifying and recognizing accomplished teachers. It also gives teachers a means of gaining greater status and upward mobility, as well as a new sense of pride and accomplishment.

Principals can look to Board-certified teachers for professional support and assistance, both with inexperienced teachers and those receptive to fresh ideas. Board certification will also assist principals in making teacher assignments, taking advantage of those who are most talented and best able to keep up with and disseminate new ideas.

Just as school populations are becoming larger and more ethnically diverse, the problem of teacher supply has been exacerbated as new windows of opportunity in other fields open for women and minorities. There are already too few minority teachers in our classrooms, and without role models there may be even fewer in the next generation. But by raising the professional level of teaching, we have an opportunity to attract minority college graduates who might otherwise pursue other career paths.

Concludes Principal Nettie Webb, "Traditionally, the principal has been viewed as the instructional leader. But in today's schools, with their complex

## What Is NBPTS?

**The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, a private, nonprofit group, was formed in 1987 in response to a recommendation from the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy. Its mission is to establish high and rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, and to develop and operate a voluntary national system to assess and certify teachers who meet those standards. NBPTS is governed by a 63-member board representing primary stakeholders in education, and principals have served on the board from its inception.**

array of problems and diverse student body, this must be a shared role. Our promise to the community is to improve student learning. With a National Board Certified Teacher on the faculty, that promise can become a reality."

**For Further Information**

**For additional information on National Board activities, write to NBPTS, 300 River Place, Suite 3600, Detroit, MI 48207.**

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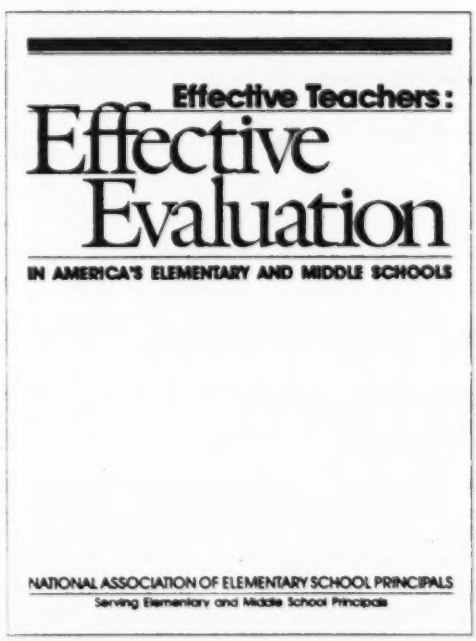
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